

Who, he asks, is for taking a car to Baghdad, and who is staying on board for the night? Everyone, in excellent spirits, sticks to the ship. There is Mrs. Lee Warren, wife of an Imperial Airways official who joined us at Tiberias on her way East to meet her husband; two Army officers for India; Mr. Luck, a ground engineer Singapore-bound; Mr. Gordon and his "lads" and our congenial and ever-obliging crew. We may as well go ashore, where there is a little quay for the marine craft, a tent and a hut used by the R.A.F. as a sailing club. The Service undoubtedly has a civilising influence.

But the heat. . . . We resolve to swim with Mr. Gordon, take a small launch back to *Camilla* (how grand she looks, and how attached to her we have become!) and grope in our cases for swim suits. It is quite dark now and we start changing in the launch.

I float on my back. Life seems very new, the strangely warm water, the almost sacred silence of the desert night, occasional laughter from the others ashore, the distant splashings of Gordon.

Back on board someone ferrets out a tortoise from a suitcase. What a priceless scene: an assortment of perspiring grown-ups competing for the favours of a six-inch tortoise on the carpeted floor of a brightly lit flying boat late at night on a lake in the middle of the desert.

Then one of Mr. Gordon's merry men produces a mouth organ and "swing" holds sway until the Captain steals



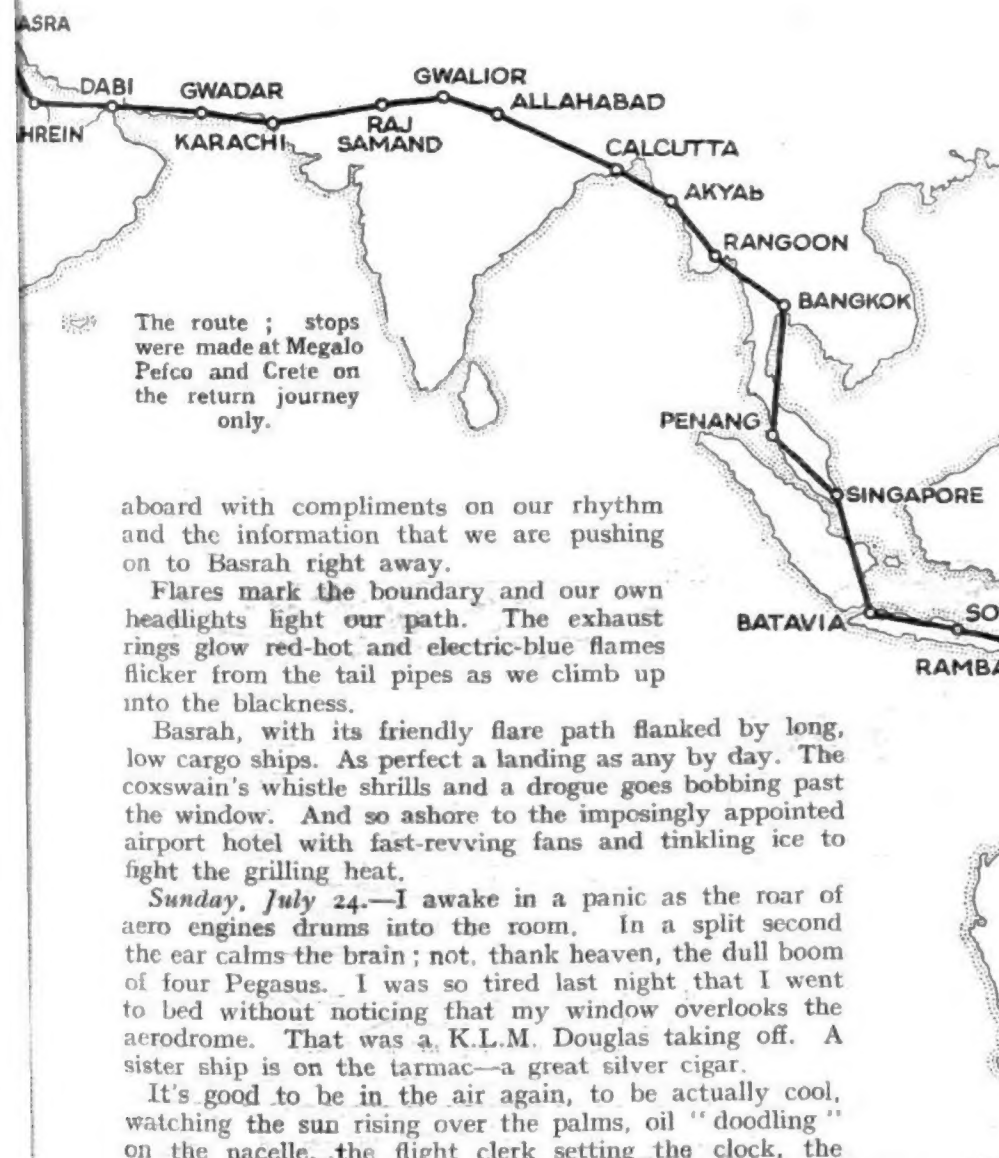
Imperial Airways are certainly not lacking in enterprise: the signpost at Karachi.

this little refuelling station is mitigated by the presence of two Ford Utilities used to take passengers who are stopping the night to the rest house—actually a fort at Sharjah, ten miles away. A formidable, but undemonstrative, gentleman, one hand on the hilt of his dagger, eyes us appraisingly.

At Gwadar, across the Gulf of Oman, there is a camel. Though lacking in bodily distinction he seems a wise old beast, and obviously views Imperial flying in its true perspective. We rumble in close enough to see the expression on his face. He ruminates without exhibiting the slightest concern at our proximity and follows our passage with his head, musing, I am sure, "Just another of those . . . flying boats."

Now, between Gwadar and Karachi we are passing one of the most fantastic sections of coast imaginable, with rocks suggesting all manner of buildings and devices.

Karachi . . . India. . . . We touch down



aboard with compliments on our rhythm and the information that we are pushing on to Basrah right away.

Flares mark the boundary and our own headlights light our path. The exhaust rings glow red-hot and electric-blue flames flicker from the tail pipes as we climb up into the blackness.

Basrah, with its friendly flare path flanked by long, low cargo ships. As perfect a landing as any by day. The coxswain's whistle shrills and a drogue goes bobbing past the window. And so ashore to the imposingly appointed airport hotel with fast-revving fans and tinkling ice to fight the grilling heat.

Sunday, July 24.—I awake in a panic as the roar of aero engines drums into the room. In a split second the ear calms the brain; not, thank heaven, the dull boom of four Pegasus. I was so tired last night that I went to bed without noticing that my window overlooks the aerodrome. That was a K.L.M. Douglas taking off. A sister ship is on the tarmac—a great silver cigar.

It's good to be in the air again, to be actually cool, watching the sun rising over the palms, oil "doodling" on the nacelle, the flight clerk setting the clock, the Euphrates winding below. We are hugging the Arabian coast down the Persian Gulf, making for Bahrein, a pearling centre.

From the jetty at Bahrein we watch shoals of little fish weaving through the clear water. A breeze which sends the dhows scudding along makes the heat bearable.

Off again, we strike east for Dabai. The desolation of

alongside big cargo steamers. The doctor approves our pulse and we are off to the hotel, where we meet Capt. Ian Ross, who will be taking us across India and down to Singapore.

(To be continued.)